



Canada lynx *Lynx canadensis*

STATUS

Threatened (65 FR 16052, March 24, 2000)

DESCRIPTION

The Canada lynx is a reclusive, highly mobile animal that inhabits large territories in remote areas. It is a member of the medium-sized cat family, with light red to gray-brown coloration and with long hind legs. Males may weigh 22 pounds and are about 34 inches long, and the females are slightly smaller. The lynx has several characteristics that distinguish it from a bobcat, including larger size, fewer spots on its coat, large and well-furred paws, long ear tufts, and a short black-tipped tail. Snowshoe hare is the primary prey of Canada lynx, and in most places, lynx populations will rise and fall in cycle with snowshoe hare numbers. Lynx will also eat other small mammals. The lynx's furry paws and long legs enable it to chase and capture hares in deep snow without sinking. Older forests with downed trees provide cover for denning, escape and protection from severe weather, but sometimes lynx will move into range-land areas near forests for food. In these events, white- and black-tailed jackrabbits, cottontail rabbits, grouse and beaver may be food sources for the lynx. March and April are usual breeding times for the lynx. Kittens are born after about nine weeks, and they remain with the mother for about ten months. Survival rates often depend on the abundance of snowshoe hares or other local food.

HISTORY

The historical range of the Canada lynx included Canada, Alaska, and about 16 northern states. In the Rocky Mountains and Cascades, lynx were found in coniferous forests. In the Great Lakes area and northeastern states, lynx inhabited forests with a variety of species such as hemlock, white pine, maple and birch.

DISTRIBUTION

Lynx were considered at one time to have been resident species of 16 states in the contiguous United States. As of August 1999, Canada lynx occurred primarily in forest habitats: the Cascade Range of Washington and Oregon; the Rocky Mountains from Montana, Idaho, and Oregon south to Utah and Colorado; the western Great Lakes region; the northeastern region from Maine south to New York and Pennsylvania and east to Massachusetts.

WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

The main threat to lynx may be loss of habitat through a variety of human activities such as logging, road construction, recreational activities, fire suppression and urban development. In the 1980s, high fur prices and trapping for fur pelts caused steep declines in lynx numbers. Winter recreation such as snowmobiling or skiing that packs snow may impact the lynx because trails provide bobcats, cougars and coyotes access to traditional deep snow habitats that were once the lynx's domain. On packed snow, bobcats and coyotes could out-compete the lynx for food and space.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

The U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station formed a scientific team to review and evaluate specific information on lynx. The team consisted of experts in the ecology of lynx, forests, snowshoe hare, and wildlife conservation including scientists from federal agencies; state wildlife agencies; the Universities of Washington, Montana and British Columbia; and private research groups and consultants.* Agencies and timber companies are reviewing lynx habitat needs, and lynx trapping is now prohibited in all states except Montana.

REFERENCES

USFWS. 1998a. Proposed rule to list the contiguous United States distinct population segment of the Canada lynx. Federal Register 63:36994-37013.

*This team published a report, "The Scientific Basis for Lynx Conservation in the Contiguous United States," available at www.fs.fed.us/r1/lynx.html

